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JESUS CHRIST AND ETERNAL LIFE.

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A THEORY of Jesus Christ based upon his life represents a new phase of religious thinking. Even the biography of Christ may be regarded as a recent product of modern thought, belonging practically to the nineteenth century. In the year 1781, when Kant's *Kritik* appeared, J. J. Hess brought out his *Lebensgeschichte Jesu*; this work was one of the earliest in the field of biographies of Christ. Before this time, during the modern enlightenment when many a philosophic problem was for the first time broached, the question of Christ's history was not taken up, although deist writers like Collins and Woolston criticised various phases of the same. To Woolston especially Strauss again and again confesses his indebtedness. From its peculiar point of view, the system of natural religion could hardly find any value in such a subject as Christ's personal history; inimical to all forms of process, and to all phases of the positive in religion, this theory considered all things in the light of reason. Because the nineteenth century has been pervaded with the historical spirit, it has evinced an interest in the actual career of Jesus; and in independence of traditional Christology there has arisen the question as to Christ's character and career. How shall the study of this question be pursued?

The philosophy of religion, which surveys the religious sentiment in its independence, also provides a means of studying the idea of Christ. His personality is studied, not in the light of an abstraction, but as a concrete element in the actual history of religion. Christ is a religious personality; he is also a historical factor. In himself uniting the ideas of religion and history, Christ became a revelation. Religion in general has ever been affected by its priest or prophet; world-religions are closely associated with great names. Apart from Christ, Christianity is nothing; and where religion is studied, not as an abstraction, but as a living and qualitative fact, the question as to the nature of a personality like Christ's becomes as vital as the problem of the world, of the soul, or of God. The discussion as to Christ's nature must thus be carried on in the sphere of religion where it is appreciated. Here it is

asked: Who was Jesus? What can He be to us today? To answer such questions, it is imperative to discover the conditions under which our thought apprehends its problems. As a result, it is hoped that we may be able to place the problem of Christ in its proper light.

Like the essence of Christianity, the idea of Christ is twofold; it consists in the belief of Jesus himself and in the disciples' faith in him. The belief and doctrine of Jesus have changed man's impression of the world and human life. As a result, man believes in Christ himself. The importance of this belief for religion cannot be overestimated; at the same time there must be noted the tendency to press on to the source of the Christian doctrine in the person of Christ. In the history of this religion, the believer has been affected first by its Founder; then, by his teaching. Christ is esteemed as something more than a teacher; he is presently regarded as the object of religious veneration.

This is not to say anything about the metaphysics of Jesus; too long has Christendom delayed in its anxiety to deduce a rationale of why and how the historical Christ should be. May it not be more consistent with the principles of actual faith to begin with the life as given in history? Then we can proceed with the aim of satisfying religious need, rather than by trying to produce a logic of theology. Christ has appeared; what can He become to us? We see that there is in man a religious life, and that in the light of this a new goal is presented to his activities. This life with its goal cannot well remain indifferent to the personality of one like Christ. Forthwith there arises the question: Of what value is the idea of Christ to us?

I.

1. In its development Christian thought was originally affected by the Christ idea of the epistles rather than by the gospel descriptions. In this way the progress of Christianity seems to have been from the epistolary to the evangelical form of expression. The apostolic conception of Christ is an essentially twofold one, appealing to thought and to life. Christ represents an idea worthy of most profound speculation; in addition to this, he is related to the believer's most intimate experience. Through Christ, God was conceived of as creating the world; and by this same Christ man is redeemed from the world. By means of Christ's death man is reconciled to God; through his life man is saved. Such conceptions predominate in apostolic thought. In the particular case of Paul, who is the leader in this style of reasoning, Christ's life and death are viewed in a second way — as practical

related to the religious life of the believer. The believer dies with Christ to all sin or taint of the world; he lives in Christ, being risen with him from the dead. The Christian's thought of God is thus bounded by the idea of Christ, while his estimate of human life is based upon Christ's character and career.

Where the soul felt itself saved from the world and living in Christ, the awakened religious consciousness became anxious to know what the actual life of the Redeemer had been. In response to some such sentiment the gospels were written. The question, "What think ye of Christ?" arose in connection with rabbinism; the answer to it which is found in the book of Acts tends to return to the Old Testament. Christ is the Son of David; at the same time he is Lord, for he is risen from the dead while David's sepulcher is still present. Like the apostles, the evangelists were of a twofold mind: Christ is the national Messiah; he is also the Son of God. In the popular mind Jesus was Judah's deliverer from Rome; he was also considered to be the divine Logos, redeeming man from the world. The further term, "Son of man," was applied in a way calculated to suggest conceptions either political or theological. The evangelists may not have appreciated the subject which they undertook, but they did not fail to point out the extraordinary character of their Lord: "These [things] are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John 20:31). In this way they summed up their own writings and adjusted them to the demands of a faith in Christ. Yet Christ was to them more than their accounts of him. Once write all that Jesus did, and the world itself could not contain the books which should be written. The gospels are not a biography of Christ, or a treatise on his teaching; written to serve a religious purpose in various Christian communities, they make a direct appeal to the religious consciousness, where they evoke worship.

2. For the working out of the New Testament idea of Christ we must look to modern rather than to mediæval thought. This is not due to the fact that the actual faith of the church was warped, but is rather to be attributed to the inappropriateness of patristic and scholastic philosophy. Our world and our view of human life are essentially different from the conceptions of a thousand years ago; hence the explanation of any idea which we now entertain is, and must be, peculiar to our own methods. History abides; religious literature is a constant factor in civilization; but the explanation of this history and the theory of such literature vary from age to age. Perhaps as never

before, we are seeing the importance of that reality which is given in history. In connection with the religious sentiment this is strikingly true; archæology has revealed a new world of literature. Such methods have only enhanced the character of the New Testament. The year 1859 is significant, not only for the publication of the *Origin of Species*, but as well for the discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus. Where the peculiar nature of religion is appreciated, and where history has been justified, the personality of Jesus is more likely to receive adequate treatment.

Leading thinkers in modern philosophy have not hesitated to take up the problem of Christ. They have done this in a manner which was at once free from traditionalism and characteristic of their own methods. During the Enlightenment the markedly political tendency was everywhere present. In the system of Hobbes modern political and theological theory finds an inception. According to this thinker, belief in Christ consists in the recognition that he was the Messiah. All other determinations fall below the standard of rational religion and evangelical faith. Similar to this is the thought of Locke. By him the essence of Christianity was found in the idea that Jesus was the Christ. Now both Hobbes and Locke urged such views for the benefit of a politically free religion; so devoid is the idea of Christ of metaphysical determinations that the absence of such in any theory should not prevent the latter from receiving full toleration. The value of such views must not be passed over lightly; for hereby was it pointed out that the true idea of Christ was the New Testament one, and that this was reconcilable with modern thought.

Modern idealism has likewise included within its field the fundamental ideas of the Christian religion. In the cases of Kant and Hegel this is clearly seen. The one has shown how closely connected with positive religion is human character; the other has made possible a historical view of religion. As a result, there has been witnessed a Kantian and a Hegelian form of Christianity. But neither of these thinkers was able to bring out the religious character of Christ or the historical view of his career. To Kant, Christ exemplified the Son of God viewed as an ideal; as a human copy of a divine being was he to be regarded. In Hegel's mind Christ signified the synthesis of the divine and human; he was the God-man. What is lacking in such views as these is the reality which comes from history alone. To satisfy the religious instinct in man somewhat more than an ideal or a speculative principle is demanded.

II.

Present-day thought must assume a very different point of view. In its most general form, the life of Christ is to be considered as an event which, taking place in the world's history, has had the effect of changing the latter's course. As a result, we may survey the life of Christ as though something most significant had come to pass. Apart from any *a priori* considerations, the history of Christ lies before the mind to be judged according to its merits. This historical happening must further be considered as making up a peculiar career. Christ conceived of his life as a mission; this was carried out, not in response to any earthly call, but with a motive which was supernatural. Christ felt himself to be carrying on a work which God might perform. The ordinary springs of human activity, like praise and fame, utility and power, were absent from his mind. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Christ's career thus had about it the character of a singular performance, wholly unparalleled in the history of humanity. His work was likewise a service wrought for the good of man. He who reads the history of Christ's life will feel that for him a singular advantage has been achieved; and this, applying as it does to all mankind, is further seen to consist in the highest possible benefit.

1. The force of Christ's career will be felt when his teaching is examined. In such a connection it becomes possible to develop a determination of the problem which shall in some wise take the place vacated by traditional metaphysics. Today we are anxious to know what kind of an impression Christ makes upon the consciousness of mankind. Having seen this, we hope to judge of his character. The pathway to all this is indicated by his teaching. It is by no means a light task to concentrate the doctrine of Christ in a word or even a proposition; but, by observing the language of the gospels, something like this may be done. Christ's own thought was affected by ideas of God's fatherhood and kingdom. In a certain sense, this double doctrine was the foundation of his teaching. Branching out from it were various precepts, centering in the twofold commandment of love toward God and toward man. Anxious to express the nature of God, as well as to content the aspirations of man's spiritual nature, Christ employed the idea of eternal life. In all this teaching the mind of Christ was itself expressed; he personally sanctions his doctrine, just as he exemplifies it.

A nearer view of Christ is obtained when the doctrine of eternal life is further examined. The conception of God as the Father with his

kingdom may hereby be made more complete. Eternal life belongs to God, who bestows it upon the members of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is a realm of life eternal; to enter it, a new life must be possessed. In a similar way, life eternal consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. God is life eternal; Christ is the one who dispenses the gift. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." In distinction from the idea of the kingdom, that of eternal life made an abiding impression upon the minds of the disciples, as the epistles clearly show. In itself, and as the mean between the principles of the Father and of the kingdom, the notion of eternal life is an important one in interpreting Christianity. In the same way it becomes essential to a comprehension of Christ's personality. We may apply it to God, whereby he is no longer regarded as a substance, but as a life absolute and everlasting. Christ's character is to be studied in the same light. He is not a thought to be surveyed by the mind; nor is he a center of moral activity, appealing to man's will. He is a life, whose value is an abiding one. Possessing eternal life, he is at the same time a historical character. To find the eternal in the form of time is a religious problem by no means easy. When this assumes the personal form, as it does in the question before us, the solution is made more satisfactory.

Christ, as the author of eternal life, is best understood when that very idea is applied to him. Said he: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." By means of his person, religion becomes organic. By virtue of his character, the religious life is made intrinsic. "Whoso loseth his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall find it." In the same way, the personality of Christ exemplifies the imperative character of that which he announced. The young man, desirous of following him, yet anxious to fulfil his filial obligation, was exhorted to let the dead bury the dead and go and follow Christ. The whole range of the Christian life is circumscribed by the character of Christ. His doctrine lives because he lives; it has force because of his personal power. Embodying eternal life, Christ becomes a definite object in the religious consciousness of the believer. For the believer to live is Christ, and to die is victory. When such effects as these are noted, the immense importance of Christ's person may in some sense be felt. Eternal life, instead of signifying that which is purely negative or abstract, becomes characteristic and personal.

But, it is asked, how stands such a view of Christ under the conditions which present life and culture impose upon us? In a twofold

way this use of Christ's person has been made ; here, by a rigid scientist, anxious to pass from the painful conditions of the natural world to that which is more in harmony with spiritual life ; there, by an advanced theologian, who abandons the concepts of traditional metaphysics, hoping to find in the idea of Christ the kernel of true religion. This is the case with Darwin and Herrmann. Darwin's feeling in this matter is revealed in his correspondence, especially in a letter to Asa Gray, in answer to whose question, "What would convince you of design?" he wrote the following: "If I saw an angel come down to teach us good, and I was convinced from others' seeing him that I was not mad, I should believe in design."¹ The organic world following laws of natural evolution seemed to Darwin to make the question of design a hopeless one ; so much so that he spoke of himself as being perhaps convinced, "if man were made of brass or iron, and in no way connected with any organism which had ever lived."² The person of Jesus, which is not infra-organic, but supra-organic, seems well calculated to take the place of this desired angel which, coming down to man, should teach him good. Relief from the limitation of the purely natural is thus found, it may be, in the idea of Christ.

The case of Herrmann is not so striking, perhaps, as the singular experience just recounted ; but it is none the less instructive. According to Herrmann, religion finds its center in the fact of man's salvation from the world ; religion is thus the belief in a supra-mundane destiny for man. But where man is perplexed by the apparently natural and historical character of his life, his belief in God leads him to see that his historical life is not thus empty, but rather that through such life he becomes a partaker of the eternal and unchangeable. But where arises this belief in man's religious destiny ? It arises in connection with the idea of Christ. His appearance, in the form of a historical phenomenon, shows what the destiny of man may be. Jesus manifestly belongs to a superior order of life ; at the same time he appears in history. When we perceive his career, we are in a better position to see the true end of human life. Such is the peculiar evolution of Christ's historical life ; with the incident of Darwin, it constitutes a new type of thought.

2. The relation of Christ's person to his doctrine of eternal life is an organic one ; he is the true representative of this realm. As for man, he finds himself fixed apparently in the world about him ; his life is wrapped up in nature and history. For that which is eternal no

¹See SCHURMAN, *Belief in God*, p. 193.

²*Ibid.*

room is made. Divine design and human destiny seem to be entirely absent; and nothing in the series of events which we call the world and its history is calculated to make up for that which is thus wanting. Lessing, who despaired of finding eternal truth among the phenomena of history, yet regarded the latter as producing the knowledge of God and immortality. This was in connection with the history of the Jews. But the personal history of Christ brings out the same truth in a manner more definite and valuable. We are able to believe in God's design and presence in the world, for in the light of these the life of Christ was manifestly ordered. In the same way it becomes possible to believe in man's destiny, inasmuch as the career of Christ shows how a human and historical life may yet belong to an order of things which is beyond nature and history. In man these same principles may likewise be found; but here they are presented as problems, not as solutions; as desires which are unsatisfied. The solving and completing of these questions are to be found in Christ alone.

In this way it comes about that eternal life relates itself to human history. Although a historical character having a human career in the world, Christ embodies eternal life in himself. We cannot regard him as the child of his day and generation, but must go on to consider him as a Master of the ages. It is easy to see that Christ has made an impression upon the world; to him history has become subject. When the character of Christ is related to that religious life which has developed by means of a historical process, we begin to see what he meant by his words: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Without his influence the history of occidental thought would have been infinitely different. Since this is so, the problem of "evidences of Christianity" assumes today a form very different from the traditional one. Christianity is here, for Christ has appeared; evidences need not be evoked to show this. The truer problem arises when, feeling the influence of Christianity and Christ, we endeavor to determine the essence of this religion and seek properly to interpret the character of its Founder. By emphasizing the idea of eternal life, we may thus see the true bearing of Christ's person. If the doctrines of the Father and the kingdom elucidate the idea of God, the idea of eternal life magnifies the historical character of Christ.

It remains to be observed how the teaching of Christ, in the shadow of which we are keeping, had its peculiar influence upon the Master himself. True, it influenced men and society, human life and human history; but the truest appreciation of these wonderful ideas was found

in Christ, who had learned them from God. In the Father he most thoroughly believed; to the will of God, as portrayed in the kingdom, he was completely subservient. Faith and obedience were thus perfect in him. These two attributes of his life may be more clearly seen in their completeness when their development is observed. In the New Testament Christ is represented as increasing in wisdom, as well as learning obedience. Finally, he knew God so perfectly that it was said, and by himself: "No man knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." At the same time his will was in perfect harmony with the Father's. So direct was Christ's attitude toward God, both in thought and in life, that his character was marvelously affected. It could not be otherwise. In especial connection with the passion does this appear. The "Captain of Salvation became perfect through suffering." "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." The ideas of the Father and his kingdom, of the Son and eternal life, were no longer mere ideas in Christ's mind as a teacher. They had become living realities. He and his Father were one; the work of establishing the kingdom was finished; Christ's career became life eternal.

III.

What Christ may become in human experience may now be seen by connecting the idea of his person with the thought of religion. Here the character of Christ assumes its proper perspective, while the problem and task which the religious consciousness presents are more perfectly handled. Traditional thought has not seen this with any degree of clearness; current theories of Christ's person vibrate between speculative notions and purely ethical ideals. Christ is either metaphysical or moral. It is as an example that Christ is today esteemed; but such an idea falls far below the religious estimate of his person. He is rather to be looked upon as the evidence of a new life. The conception of example is limited and fragmentary, just as it is far inferior to the idea which represents Christ as the manifestation of a life, supernatural and eternal. We look to Christ, not merely as one who may aid us in arranging the details of our everyday existence, but rather as the author of a new scene of things where religion indeed may be realized. The one view appeals only to scattered and superficial activities, which seek to be directed by asking, "What would Jesus do?"; the other makes its way to the very soul of man, as he endeavors to pass from the unsatisfactory conditions of immediate existence

to that which is more satisfactory. Then Christ appears in all the power of his personality, and with his doctrine of eternal life he makes this possible.

But this evaluation of Christ's person, as well as the solution of the religious problem, depends upon the idea of religion which may be entertained. Where a profound conception of religion and a thoughtful view of Christ are brought out, nothing but gain can accrue to each when they are united in our thought. According to the seriousness with which the fact of religion is apprehended, and the difficulty which it presents is felt, will the person and performance of Christ be valued. In general, and with the briefest possible mode of expression, it may be said that religion denies the whole world, and man's immediate life in the same, to affirm a new realm where eternal life is manifest. Practically viewed, religion consists in an effort on the part of the soul to affirm itself over against the world with its unsatisfactory conditions. To accomplish such a task, help must come from without the pale of earthly existence; when the soul sees this it is constrained to believe in God, who is not only the author of eternal life, but the one who makes possible the actual attainment of it by man.

In the history of religion the more definite solution of this question, theoretically and practically viewed, is to be found. Because this history comprises various stages, which represent different degrees of advancement from purely natural existence to eternal life, it affords a series of efforts by means of which the soul, inspired by a peculiar hope, may emancipate itself and live in its own true sphere. This progress of the religious spirit, as the latter slowly realizes itself, is accompanied by successive revelations on the part of God. As man's religious character becomes more and more perfect, his view of God assumes a correspondingly more worthy form. This twofold movement culminates in Christianity, which forms a peculiar unity of the human and divine. Where man's religious life becomes an eternal one, God's character is seen to be absolute.

But the Christian religion is nothing apart from Christ. It may be religion, pure and undefiled, just as it may stand for the final stage in the development of human worship; but it is likewise saturated with the ideas and influence of its Founder. A searching view of his character can only show that he was possessed of the religious life, and that in the highest degree. Who more completely than he turned away from the world, denying its power over him? Who more fully than he asserted the reality of eternal life, and the presence of the Father's

kingdom? Christ himself was religious, and in a manner far different from the usual experience of mankind. So perfectly did Christ realize the religious principle that he was able to affirm of himself: "I have overcome the world." To this he added the positive truth: "My Father and I are one." No longer was the religious life an ideal or hope; it had suddenly become a fact. As a result, Christ is an object of the most intense interest to the religious consciousness. After writing his *Leben Jesu* Strauss spoke of Christ as "the highest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion; the being without whose presence in the mind perfect piety is impossible." Such a conception is significant indeed. Religion without Christ would be as empty as the sense of beauty without art. When Christ is once seen, the danger of mere subjectivism passes away. No longer are we entertaining ideals; no longer are we content with hopes; Christ is come and religion is realized. In comparison with such direct evidence, the results of metaphysical and moral theorizing about Christ's person and character are at once set aside as being insufficient. There is a more excellent way. Perceiving the gain that accrues to our religious convictions when we look at the religious career of Christ, we willingly relinquish all attempts to demonstrate the essential nature of Christianity's Founder, just as we set aside all purely moral constructions of his character.

The religious view of Christ maintains a superiority to be found, neither in the method of speculating upon his being, nor in the more practical manner of estimating the activities of his will. By virtue of the religious method human feelings are more perfectly satisfied, just as the problem of Christ seems to be placed in a more satisfactory light. No longer is it necessary to speak of the "human" and the "divine" in Christ; for these words, which find no place in the New Testament, suggest a dualism which it is no longer necessary to set up or to overcome. These notions are the product of a mediævalism which desired to canonize; as also of a modernism which goes to the other extreme, that of secularism. Neither of these expressions evokes the religious principle in man. The "divine" in Christ does not afford us a means of attaining to eternal life; the "human" view does not measure up to the demands of the religious problem. Here is the final test. We would regard Christ as the being who makes possible the highest religious life. For this peculiar insight is demanded.

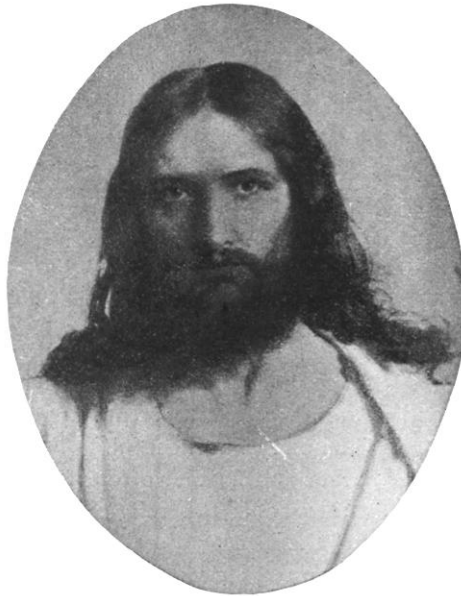
Both in the career which Christ pursued and in the character which he possessed, the religious consciousness in man finds an unwonted

satisfaction. At once the aspirations of the human heart are realized. It is true that popular thinking loves to dwell upon the distinction between the ideal and the real. The ideal is felt in the mind, but never realized in experience; hence the pain of disappointment and defeat. But is this the true state of the case? Certain it is that the mind forms images and sets up trains of thought which are distinct from the actual conditions of life; and these floating ideas may seem to be more varied and wonderful than the given facts of experience. But here the reverse would seem to be true. Christ in his historical life surpasses all messianic interpretations; his kingdom is not of this poor world. What is actually experienced in him could not have been produced by the imagination of man. God is in human history and communes with human life. The plan and purpose of that divine life, are now seen to be in some sense parallel with our own strivings, when these are interpreted after the manner of Christ. The perpetual fear which engrosses the heart, when it asks, "What is the end of human existence?" is overcome by that assurance which is found in Christ that to man belongeth life eternal.

What sort of impression has Christ made upon the soul? This is a question which our current psychological tendencies put forth. The answer to it must not be made in the spirit of an easy-going sociology which goes on to speak of the ameliorating influences of Christ's teaching and example. Humanity has been helped in a more essential way. Nor is the effect of the idea of Christ upon the mind to be measured according to the subjectivism of psychology. We do not care to know how we feel when we think of Jesus, but would discover the manner in which his character appeals to a more profound religious consciousness. In such a connection as this that vivid conception of eternal life which it has been his work to create appeals to us as the altogether desirable and the one thing needful.

Christ is, then, the author and finisher of our faith in eternal life; all this is due to the fact that he is the religious character *par excellence*. Hereby he becomes the direct object of human faith. Determined in this way, the person of Jesus is open to a new series of qualities; chief among these are faith, which makes of Christ an object of belief, and worship, which contributes sanctity to the idea of his person. When the religious consciousness is aroused within man, he cannot content himself with thoughts about Christ, nor will he be satisfied with an exercise of activities which may be directed toward his person. To fulfil the demands of the heart, Christ must be wor-

shipped; but this adoration must be understood and undertaken in a worthy sense. How often and how vainly do we seek to portray the character of Christ, with the result that our words end in mere compliment or praise! "Good Master" was the term used by one of the earliest of these admirers; in rebuking him, Christ disdained the shallow flattery, and then showed him how serious was the search after eternal life. Worship as applied to him shall not consist of any sacerdotal process; for such an attitude of mind is too subjective. Christ is a religious object, the highest which we know; our attitude toward him is to be determined only after profound religious feeling. Then the religious consciousness is filled and eternal life made possible.



CHRIST THE CONSOLER.

—*Carl Bloch.*